



2013 Garden Plot Rules and Guidelines

The Fairfax County Garden Plot Program is a community garden plot rental program. Residents participating in the program enjoy nature, plant flowers, grow fruits and vegetables for food, and get exercise from the practice of gardening. The Garden Plot Rules and Guidelines provide the gardeners, their families, and the entire gardening community with basic principles for a successful garden plot program.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. Purpose of the Program
- II. Gardener Eligibility
- III. Rules
- IV. Guidelines
- V. Administration

I. Purpose of the Program

The Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) provides Fairfax County residents the opportunity to participate in a community gardening experience through the Community Garden Plot program. More than 700 garden plots in nine County parks are rented on an annual basis. Most plots measure 30 feet by 20 feet; a few smaller plots, 10 feet by 20 feet, are available at some locations. Gardening is permitted when the park is open, generally from dawn to dusk.

The rules and guidelines for the Garden Plot Program ensure that all participating gardeners have the opportunity for a positive gardening experience, that garden plot sites are an asset to the community, and that all plots are used in a productive manner.

Many residents want to garden, and we have waiting lists of willing gardeners. By following the rules and guidelines, you show that you want to garden successfully in a community garden plot program. All gardeners agree to follow the rules and guidelines of the Garden Plot Program.

II. Gardener Eligibility*

The following criteria establish eligibility for having a garden plot:

1. Must be residents of Fairfax County. If you move from the county, you must return your plot at the end of the growing season.
2. Must sign and return rental contracts with payment by the date on the contract.
3. May have only one garden plot per household.
4. Must grow food in the rental garden plots for personal consumption. Food may not be grown for commercial purposes.
5. Must agree to comply with rules identified in Section III for the duration of the rental agreement.

* Some gardeners have been granted exceptions for residency eligibility and multiple plot rentals. These gardeners who wish to continue with these exceptions for residency and multiple plots should request a continuance of the exception. All requests should be submitted, in writing, to the Garden Plot Coordinator.

III. Rules

Below are the rules that govern the program. These rules ensure that the plots are gardened, that the area is safe, and that policies and laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Fairfax County, and the Fairfax County Park Authority are followed (*Source: Code of Virginia: §15.2-5704 and §15.2-5705*

<http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?000+cod+15.2-5704>
and <http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?000+cod+15.2-5705>

When gardeners sign the Garden Plot rental contract each year, they acknowledge that they have read and understand the following rules.

1. All gardening activities must be contained within the plot boundaries as marked by the Garden Plot Coordinator.
2. Prepare your entire plot for gardening and begin planting by May 1. Garden must be “active,” which means having two-thirds of the land in cultivation. Complete fall clean-up by November 15. Clean-up activities include removal of dead plants and weeds, securing plant supports, and mending fences. Plant a cover crop such as rye grass, if desired. Active winter gardening is encouraged.
3. Fences must have mesh fence materials and may be no taller than 6 feet, but can have a single strand of wire or string above the fence. The total height of the fence and strand of string or wire is not to exceed 8 feet. Additional guidelines for fences appear below in Section IV, paragraph 1.
4. Simple, non-permanent structures, such as trellises, raised beds and deck box containers are permitted. Neither solid walls nor roofs are permitted.
5. Poured concrete may not be used to anchor fence posts or other structures.
6. Gardeners may not dig channels or create berms outside of their plots.
7. Mulches such as stone, carpet and artificial turf are prohibited.
8. All woody plants, such as trees, shrubs, roses, woody vines, etc., must be kept shorter than 6 feet. All woody plants are measured from the top of the soil line to the highest branch of the plant. If a gardener’s plant roots extend and/or creates shade in a neighboring plot, the gardener may be asked by the Garden Plot Coordinator to remove or relocate the plant.
9. If you must use a pesticide, you MUST follow these rules.
 - a) READ THE LABEL. It is against federal law to use a pesticide on a pest or crop that is not listed on the label.
 - b) NO restricted pesticide (pesticides requiring a permit for use) is permitted under any circumstances, even if the person is a licensed pesticide applicator.
 - c) Research the problem pest and the guidelines for managing it in the Virginia Pest Management Guide, <http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/pmg/index.html>.
 - d) Mix and apply the pesticide according to the label. Increasing the dose or frequency may harm your crop or other people.
 - e) For everyone’s safety, NO commercial, chemical or organic pesticides and NO fertilizers may be stored anywhere in the garden plot at any time, including locked storage bins.
 - f) Flamers or torches for weed control are NOT permitted due to the risk of fire and personnel safety (*Source: Fairfax County Park Authority Policy Manual, March, 2008: Appendix 7, §1.06 A, Fires* [<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parkpolicy/FCPAPolicyManual.pdf>]).

10. According to state and local game regulations, it is illegal to bait or trap or transport any animals across property lines. (*See Fairfax County Park Authority Policy Manual, March, 2008: Appendix 7, Park Authority Regulations, §1.22, Wildlife and Habitat Protection* [<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parkpolicy/FCPAPolicyManual.pdf>]).
11. Take all trash and plant debris that you do not compost within your plot to your home, or to a citizen trash collection location, such as the center on West Ox Road. DO NOT dump plants or trash anywhere outside of your plot, or in surrounding park or wooded areas. It is illegal to dump anywhere on Commonwealth of Virginia and Fairfax County property. (*Source: Code of Virginia: § 33.1-346, [<http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?000+cod+33.1-346>]*).
12. Gardeners may not store excess lumber, fencing mesh or other materials not needed for gardening at their plots for aesthetic and safety reasons.
13. Garden plots are to be maintained throughout the season with active planting, harvesting, and weeding.
 - a) Keep weeds under control throughout the year.
 - b) Keep weeds off fences and weed 6 inches on the outside of the non-shared fence(s) (i.e., remove weeds from the fence to where the ground crew mows).
 - c) Fences and other structures are to be kept in good condition: gates on hinges; posts and fence materials upright; no sharp/rusty wire or other protuberances that could cause injury.
14. Do not block off-road garden paths and aisle ways with structures, equipment, debris, or vehicles (*Source: Fairfax County Park Authority Policy Manual, March, 2008, Appendix 7, Park Authority Regulations: §1.14 E, Motor Vehicles and Traffic, [<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parkpolicy/FCPAPolicyManual.pdf>]*).

Gardeners who are not in compliance with these rules will:

1. Receive a notice by mail, email and/or phone from the Garden Plot Coordinator;
2. Have 14 calendar days to correct the problem upon receipt of the notice; and,
3. If the problem(s) is/are not corrected or addressed within the allotted time frame, the garden plot may be reclaimed and reassigned.

IV. Guidelines

These guidelines are designed to make gardening enjoyable and successful for you and your garden plot neighbors. For more gardening information, visit the Green Spring Gardens library, the Green Spring Gardens website, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/greenspring/plots.htm>, and the Virginia Cooperative Extension website, <http://www.ext.vt.edu/>.

1. Fences

Fences are not required. If a gardener chooses to erect a fence, it must consist of mesh fencing material and no taller than 6 feet. The gardener supplies the materials and labor.

- a) Fence posts may be wood or metal, and may be up 8 feet tall and up to 4 inches wide. Posts must be placed deep enough into the soil to securely anchor the post. **NO poured concrete may be used.** Metal fence posts with a flange at the base are highly recommended.

- b) The maximum fence height is 6 feet. Fencing materials must be open mesh for all fences between plots. String or wire may be used above the fence to deter deer. Gardeners with fences on the outside edge may request a variance for fence material by letter or email to the Garden Plot Coordinator.
- c) Fences may be used as a trellis between plots only if BOTH garden plot renters agree. Fences on the outside edge may be used as a trellis for plants if the plants do not encroach or obstruct the path. We recommend separate trellises within the plot border.
- d) Plots not in compliance with fencing and structure rules on May 1, 2012 will be reclaimed. Please contact the Garden Plot Coordinator with any fencing questions.

2. *Structures*

The gardener supplies the materials and labor for non-permanent structures.

- d) Raised beds are permitted. Wood is recommended for the bed edging, but not required.
- a) Simple trellis structures are permitted if they do not shade other gardens. DO NOT use poured concrete for anchoring. Neither solid walls nor solid roofs are permitted.
- b) Storage bins for tools are permitted with a maximum size 30 inch by 30 inch by 60 inch. We recommend using plastic deck storage boxes.
- c) Row covers are permitted. Please anchor them to prevent blowing away, and store them when not in use.
- d) Cold frames are permitted if they are no larger than 30 inch by 30 inch by 60 inch and covers are made of sturdy plastic not glass.

3. *Making Good Plant Choices*

Gardeners may grow a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers. Choosing from among the wide range of plants for the garden is challenging and fun! The guidelines below will help you make good choices for gardening in a community garden plot program. Talk to your gardening neighbors to share ideas for good plant choices for success.

- a) Perennials such as asparagus, rhubarb, and many desirable flowers are permitted. Divide them as needed to manage their size. Take them with you when you leave the garden plot program.
- b) Herbaceous vines are permitted. Seek your neighbor's permission to grow them on a common fence.
- c) No plants on the Virginia Invasive Plant List, www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/documents/invlist.pdf, may be grown. Many of these are weeds in areas surrounding the garden plots. Please control them as much as you can.
- d) Some desirable plants can be weedy, such as raspberries, blackberries, mints, morning glories, and fennel. Please keep these plants 1 foot or more away from plot boundaries. Grow plants like mint in pots to contain them. Remove and throw away seed heads before the seeds ripen. Take the plants with you when you leave the garden plot program.
- e) Gardeners may plant a fall crop or cover crop after the summer season.

4. *Mulch*

Using mulch in your garden plot has many benefits. As organic mulches break down, they add valuable nutrients to your soil. You will need less fertilizer. They also help conserve water.

- a) Organic mulches, such as compost, leaves, straw, and shredded bark are highly recommended to conserve water and add nutrients to the soil.
- b) Non-biodegradable mulches, such as stone, carpet and artificial turf, are prohibited. Plastic and porous weed blocker covers are permitted, but need to be secured to the ground to prevent them from blowing away.
- c) Composting plant materials within the plot is an excellent way to reduce trash and conserve nutrients. Do not compost food scraps (such as meat, oils, or fat), as this attracts animals.
- d) Avoid fresh manure which may contain weed seeds, smells bad, and may have sanitary issues that could affect neighboring plots. Composted manure is permitted.
- e) Mulch delivery to Fairfax County Parks is determined by the Fairfax County Department of Solid Waste Management. Garden Plot renters may obtain mulch at the following parks: Baron Cameron, Lewinsville, Pine Ridge/Bo White, and Grist Mill. Gardeners can also pick up mulch from E.C. Lawrence, Bull Run Regional Park, the I-95 Citizens' Recycling and Disposal Facility, and the I-66 Citizens' Recycling and Disposal Facility. For Fairfax County mulch delivery information, refer to the Fairfax County web site: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/trash/dispmulch.htm>. The mulch is available for use by all Fairfax County citizens, not just garden plot renters. Please contact the Garden Plot Coordinator at 703.642.0128 with mulch delivery questions.

5. *Watering*

Most of the community garden plot sites have water faucets where gardeners may attach their own hoses. Many gardeners must share the same faucet. We recommend using water conservation methods such as mulching and selecting plants that use less water. Earth-friendly and low-water gardening methods are encouraged.

- a) All hoses must be stored in areas that do not present a safety problem to other gardeners or to the mowing crews that maintain the common areas. Mowing crews are not responsible for damage to hoses.
- b) All gardeners should have a Y-splitter to attach to the main faucet while they are watering their plot. This will enable another gardener to water simultaneously.
- c) Hoses may not be hung on other gardeners' fences without their permission.
- d) All gardeners should be considerate when using the water. If someone is waiting to water, please limit your time to 15 minutes.
- e) Fix leaky hoses and leaky connections so water is not wasted or cause a problem with soggy spots in other plots or common areas. Please report water faucet problems to the Garden Plot Coordinator.
- f) Standing water or excessively wet spots are breeding grounds for mosquitoes, which are a health hazard. Empty all containers and store them upside down.

6. *Managing Pests*

There are many potential pests in the garden, such as weeds, insects, fungi, small mammals, etc. Most can be controlled using good gardening practices. We ask all gardeners to try these actions first.

Remember the garden plot community is like a crowded neighborhood. Your actions can affect everyone. Please use any commercial pesticide very sparingly and only as a last resort. See the Rules for specific guidance on pesticide use.

- a) Choose plant varieties that are appropriate for our area and are resistant to pests.

- b) Keep plants healthy by using compost for fertilizer and mulches to retain water. Over-watering can cause diseases to increase.
- c) Get a soil test every three years.
- d) Remove insects by hand, such as caterpillars and beetles.
- e) Clean up dead and diseased plants immediately.
- f) Get ideas from the Garden Plot Coordinator, your fellow gardeners, bulletin boards, books and magazines, and the Internet to help you resolve your pest problems safely.

Small mammals, such as mice, voles, rabbits, squirrels and groundhogs can be a problem. Barrier methods, such as fencing below the soil line and netting, may help protect your crops.

7. Existing Plot Condition

- a) All plots are rented in their existing condition.
- b) Where possible, the Garden Plot Coordinator will work with the new renter to identify mentor gardeners to assist with initial clearing of the plot.

V. Administration

1. Program Management

The Fairfax County Garden Plot Program is managed by the Fairfax County Park Authority through the Community Horticulture Office at Green Spring Gardens. Patricia Dietly, the Garden Plot Coordinator, manages the day-to-day operations and can be reached at 703-642-0128. You may also e-mail the Garden Plot Coordinator at patricia.dietly@fairfaxcounty.gov.

2. Rental Procedures

- a) Garden Plots are rented on an annual basis from February 1 through January 31.
- b) Rental contracts are mailed in December and must be signed and returned with payment by the date on the contract.
- c) Gardeners in good standing will be automatically mailed renewal contracts. At that time a gardener may request a trade to a different plot, if any is available.
- d) As a garden plot renter, the gardener and family members agree to abide by the rules and guidelines of the program.

3. Inspections

- a) The Garden Plot Coordinator will inspect and send written notices to gardeners whose plots are not in compliance with the rules, who interfere with neighbors; or, whose plots are not used appropriately.
- b) The Garden Plot Coordinator will contact the garden plot renter to address problems.
- c) Gardeners who fail to address a rules violation within 14 calendar days, or within an alternative timeframe specified by the Garden Plot Coordinator, risk losing their garden plot rental.

4. Plot Return Policy

- a) Gardeners may return their plots at any time by contacting the Garden Plot Coordinator at 703-642-0128.

- b) Garden plot renters may not give away or sublet their rented plot to other renters. All garden plot trades or plot rental terminations must be managed by the Garden Plot Coordinator.
- c) Fees are not returned or prorated if a garden plot is returned early or if it is reclaimed.

5. *Waitlist*

Gardening is popular, and we maintain a waitlist of potential new garden plot renters. Aspiring gardeners may enter the list by completing the form on the website <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/greenspring/plots.htm> or by calling 703-642-0128.

- a) Names remain on the list from year to year, if no plot is offered.
- b) If the offered plot is refused, the person may re-enter at the end of the waitlist.
- c) Renters whose plots are reclaimed or not renewed may re-enter at the end of the waitlist.

6. *Safety*

- a) Renters garden at their own risk.
- b) Since all plot locations are in public parks, the public cannot be banned from these areas. FCPA assumes no responsibility for any loss or damage to personal property, plants or produce at the Garden Plots.
- c) Should you observe illegal activities, such as theft, alcohol use, malicious damage, etc., please contact the Fairfax County Police Department at 703-691-2131. You may file a report at the Fairfax County Police Department website, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/crs/>.

Be a good community garden member and enjoy the benefits of gardening in the Garden Plot Program. If you have any questions, please contact the Garden Plot Coordinator at 703-642-0128.



If accommodations or alternative formats are needed, please call 703-324-8563 at least 10 working days before event. TTY 703-803-3354

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